

Hogan's Trial, Not Vince's

F

or all of the passion held for the Vince McMahon trial among the wrestling media and newsletter readers, McMahon was not the key issue for most big-city journalists.

Outside of opening day and the announcement of the verdict, broadcast media coverage of the McMahon trial was minimal---except for one key day of testimony: that of Hulk Hogan. The Hogan focus illustrated the frequent criticism of major market media outlets in zeroing in on the celebrity aspect of news, rather than the issues behind a story.

The issue of illegal steroid use and distribution and whether they were used to build a multimillion dollar business was far secondary to whether Hogan himself availed himself of anabolic substances to build a career of megacelebrity proportion.

Had viewers not watched local New York newscasts on July 6, 14 and 22, they may not have even been aware McMahon was on trial---which may have been as large a victory for Vince as the verdict itself.

Just a sampling of the broadcast media coverage in the host market of New York:

COMMENTARY

***A mild sprinkling of stories on the opening day of testimony, but only from one of the big-three network owned-and-operated stations (WNBC) and reporter Rosemary Gomez of WPIX but nothing from WWOR and WNYW, both of which had portrayed the case heavily in preliminary stories.

***Live reports on the early-evening newscast of WNBC the nights of July 12 and 13, predominantly to promote the upcoming appearance of Hogan.

***Detailed reports across the board of Hogan's testimony on virtually every New York station on the evening of the July 14 Hogan testimony. McMahon's name was hardly mentioned in the stories, outside of the question of whether McMahon had ever sold or given Hogan a steroid.

***For about four hours on the 14th, the on-the-hour news from ABC Information Radio told of Hogan's admissions of using steroids for more than a decade. However, the summaries detailed how Hogan "testified at the federal trial of a well-known wrestling promoter," never mentioning McMahon by name.

***A limited verdict-watch July 21 when WABC, WNBC, WPIX and WWOR presented anchor on-camera or voiceover reports telling viewers the case had gone to the jury.

Matwatch
'94

Steve

Beverly

As a rule, I do not like to digress into personal matters in this publication because most of you subscribe to get my take on key broadcast/cable issues of this industry. However, because of so many phone calls and cards about our trip to Estonia, I am expanding this issue to eight pages to tell you briefly of the most moving experience of our lives.

Likewise, we have devoted a portion of page 7 in tribute to a man who was my journalistic father. He passed away July 26 and I wanted to spend a few moments to reflect on his influence on me.

Estonia. To translate the emotional side of a two-week mission trip is impossible. All we can literally do is offer you a taste of what we experienced.

The 39 of us--22 from Tennessee, 16 from Kentucky, one from Indiana, left June 16 primarily on a mission to help build a church for people in the Baltic States who had no permanent home of worship during a half-century of Soviet domination.

When in our country, religion has become such an asinine object of political correctness and national attack from nuts like Vic Fazio, we found refreshing interacting with people whose unrestricted religious freedom and expression has become the greatest treasure.

But not only did we work on constructing the Agape Center, my wife and I had the joy of working with a vacation Bible school for children in a city park adjacent to our building site. We began with 120 children opening day and by week's end, the number grew to 220. Perhaps they were mesmerized by a group of Americans, by our puppets, or our unorthodox leader with his lessons illustrated in balloons and illusions. But these were the best-behaved and most loving and gracious children we have ever met. They aren't so sophisticated to be bored at every turn and not even a language barrier could deflate their responsiveness.

One of my honors was to lead a six-hour media seminar in the Hotel Strand, which was the former Estonian headquarters of the KGB. Five years ago, to openly discuss

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Media: It Was a Hogan Trial

(Continued from Page 1)

***A bizarre July 18 "I-Team" report on WWOR, which provided absolutely nothing of an investigatory nature and merely went into detail about the four-day-old testimony of Hogan and examining the possible impact on his career because of lies he had told on *The Arsenio Hall Show* and to his wife.

***Comprehensive coverage of the verdict, along with excerpts of the post-trial press conference with McMahon and interviews with jurors, none of whom were named. WABC was the first to check in with a live report from the courthouse at 5:08 p.m. (EDT) on the 22nd, approximately one hour after the verdict was delivered. WNBC was in two minutes later and WCBS at approximately 5:15.

***The independent stations all covered the case on their prime time newscasts with WPIX and WWOR offering interviews with prosecutor Sean O'Shea, as well as similar coverage to the afternoon network affiliate newscasts.

Steve Beverly

(Continued from Page 1)

the free flow of information in that venue would likely have led to our being imprisoned or shot.

Estonian radio and television sent four representatives to the seminar. Their industry is slowly growing from the shackles of Communism. But Estonian TV can only afford eight hours a day of air time and money is too expensive (interest rates at approximately 30 per cent) for investment in local stations as we know them--though the Voice of America provides an English language service on FM.

One of my fondest memories is of the relationship I built with 13-year-old Allar Tankler, publisher of the only magazine tailored for children in Estonia. He has a sizeable subscription list and Allar reminds me of many of the youngsters who have tried to start wrestling bulletins in the USA. Only Allar's has a far broader base and is much more successful. He told me Estonians are not familiar with American pro wrestling but they have heard of Hulk Hogan. Their primary international sports focus is on soccer and the NBA (of which we saw the championship finals live on German television at 4:30 a.m.). Allar adopted me as a journalistic mentor and he has become the only Estonian subscriber to *Matwatch '94*.

Our mission in Estonia was multifold but the lifetime of memories we have returned with stems from the bonds of friendship made across eight time zones. The encouraging signs of a people who are truly optimistic they will make it on their own after an era of oppression. The chance for Christianity to have a chance to survive without government limitations. And the faces of hundreds of children whom we wanted to adopt. Our lives will never be the same--but thanks to God, we had a chance to go.

Where we became disillusioned with the coverage is the inability to get a take from the New York broadcast media on a day-to-day basis, which--though often a drudgery in following technical testimony--is the only way one is afforded the chance to follow strategy, trends and progress within a case.

Dave Meltzer's accounts in *The Real Wrestling Hotline* and a limited number of New York print media sources, most of which are not available outside of the top ten markets, provided a far broader daily account of the trial.

The early lack of coverage may have been blamed on the extensive coverage of the far more captivating O.J. Simpson trial. I contacted WWOR prime time anchor Brenda Blackmon, whom I started with in television news at WRBL-TV in Columbus, Ga., in 1976. I asked why the absence of focus on the McMahon case when her own station had presented several detailed and potentially damaging accounts of the investigation into McMahon and Titan Sports. Brenda as much as conceded it was a matter of both budget and celebrity focus. "The big guns are going to come out for Hogan," Brenda told me. "You'll see every station in this town covering that day because he is considered the star figure of this case."

And that is exactly the way the coverage was directed. In Gomez's report on July 14, she was the only reporter who speculated on the possibility of Hogan losing his role model image and even his *Thunder in Paradise* television series because of potential negative feedback from the testimony. Yet, three nights later, Hogan almost single-handedly carried WCW to a record pay-per-view revenue (see page 3).

This coverage cried out for two sidebar stories which no New York station offered (and even the preliminary investigatory stories virtually ignored these aspects): 1) what are steroids, why are they illegal, how much of an impact are they having on young people and what are the potential side-effects? Even though this story has been nationally featured in sports magazines and scattered television newscasts, timeliness is everything in educating the public on the issue behind a trial--in this case, steroids; 2) how much time and expenditure of taxpayers' money did the government invest in this case and why--after three years of digging--could it not come up with even a single misdemeanor conviction? Where did the case go wrong? Where did it fall apart? Those questions were never answered in the media.

The media coverage of the United States vs. Vince McMahon points up again the emphasis on celebrity in major American journalism over issues--particularly at the local level. And in this specific case, McMahon was not even considered celebrity enough to merit daily comprehensive, educated reporting.

Hogan Draws a One



fter a week of the most intensive media exposure in the history of World Championship Wrestling, Hulk Hogan carried the company to a record number of pay-per-view subscribers and amount of gross revenues for the July 17 *Bash at the Beach* show in Orlando. The show apparently will pull in a 1 per cent buy-rate....purchased in approximately 240,000 homes.

Multichannel News, the bible of the pay-cable industry, reported the 1 per cent figure (highest in three years for a WCW show) for a gross revenue of \$6.25 million. That, and the 240,000 subscriber estimate, are all-time WCW records. The buy-rate up 53 per cent over the *Slamboree* event in May.

The magazine's pay-per-view editor, Tom Umstead, told *Matwatch '94*, "The Turner people are claiming a 1-and-a-half, which of course, won't happen. But they are going to hit the 1 pretty easily. Most of the major markets are reporting double or greater the usual business for a WCW pay-per-view." The show also topped the estimated 0.71 buy-rate percentage for the *WWF King-of-the-Ring* in June.

Based on estimates of an 0.92 break-even figure for *Bash*, the show will be at least marginally profitable for WCW, which spent an estimated \$450,000 on advertising and promotion for the special.

Let's analyze what this means other than \$\$\$\$\$ for World Championship Wrestling and Hogan:

1. WCW is a Hulk Hogan promotion....no ifs, ands or buts. You see it assorted maneuverings. First, a group of mid-to-undercard WCW performers are expected to be laid off in favor of a group Hogan wants. Second, the reason the August *Clash* is being held in the unlikely city of Cedar Rapids is because Hogan wanted it there. Third, look at the extensive advertising for Hogan's personal hotline on the WCW shows. We now see more spots for the Hogan line than for WCW's. What this guy wants, he gets.

2. If Hogan draws a strong *Clash* rating in August and *Halloween Havoc* draws strong business, bet the mortgage WCW will re-sign Hogan, who will probably up his price exorbitantly for a contract renewal in 1995. But if business can kick up this high....and folks, whether you want to accept it or not, Hogan was the reason for that major buy-rate increase....even if it requires approval from Ted Turner, this company will keep Hogan because it can't afford to allow this to be a six-month wonder. Even if WCW ultimately loses money on the Hogan deal, it profits in intangible ways, such as more mainstream national publicity on shows it could not have bought its way onto previously. The closest WCW has ever come to national entertainment exposure of this ilk was its past three week-long shots on *Family Feud* and people forgot those a month after they were over.

3. This solidifies Eric Bischoff as senior vice president of the company for at least another year. Bischoff will take full credit for bringing Hogan in. But pressure will still be on to improve the weekly TV ratings, which are not moving well.

4. Sad to say for most traditionalist and NWA veteran fans but this appears to be the end of the Ric

Flair era as we have known it. As painful as this is for longtimers, Flair could never command the national publicity and exposure as a Hogan and Hogan vs. Flair can't go on forever....or much longer. Flair, even as head WCW booker, certainly cannot be happy about this turn of events in which Hogan is calling the primary shots. There has to be an ultimate clashing of egos over this. I simply do not believe Hogan will ever lose that belt back to Flair, particularly if it is a match of last impression with the viewers.

5. One has to consider where this leaves Sting. Reports are surfacing on computer bulletin boards that Vince McMahon has a done deal with Sting for heavy guaranteed money to come to New York and carry the banner of the New Generation of WWF. He'd be the ideal one to do that and would probably be far better marketed than WCW has ever done. Frankly, at this point....and this is going to make some people mad....I still believe Sting is of a lot more value to WCW than Flair and if the budget makes one disposable, I believe it ought to be Flair. Frankly, unless Sting has made a commitment to Titan, and rumors of that have exploded with increasing intensity over the last four weeks, I believe Hogan still has a trump card here. Sting has made four appearances on *Thunder in Paradise* and I believe if no Titan deal has been made, if Hogan wants Sting to stay in WCW, Sting will stay.

6. Hogan has to have viewed that tape and been unhappy with one element of the show....the announcing of that main event. Tony Schiavone, in my opinion, offered the weakest play-by-play of any topline bout on a pay-per-view short of McMahon's poor effort at the *Royal Rumble*. Only one guy who should be calling WCW pay-per-views and he happens to be a favorite of Hogan. That man is Jim Ross. With his WWF contract soon to be on the line....I wouldn't be surprised to see Hogan and Hart demand his hiring over the objections of Bill Shaw and Bischoff....who still have their own political problems with Ross. If Hogan's bouts are going to be major league....he needs a major league guy calling them on the air and that guy is not Schiavone.

7. As an incentive, does Ted Turner try to throw in a family picture deal with TNT in an effort to keep Hogan next year? Don't be surprised. That's Turner's personal trump card and since Hogan's box office career has been a bust, Turner could keep him happy by offering him a two-or-three pic made-for-TNT deal. The one area TNT has not explored is family movies at a time when the market is strongly building for that audience. Hogan would be the choice for that.

Of course....six months from now....all of this analysis may be for nought. But let's see how much of this follows when December comes.

THE RATINGS PAGE

CABLE WRESTLING RATINGS

WHAT THEY MEAN

JUNE				
Monthly Averages	Rtg/Share	Tot. Homes	May Avg.	June '93
Monday Night Raw	3.2/5.0	1.984 million	3.0/4.5	2.8/4.5
WCW Sat. Night	2.1/5.6	1.304 million	2.2/5.5	2.0/5.2
WCW Main Event	1.8/4.3	1.138 million	1.7/3.7	2.0/4.9
WWF All-American	1.7/5.4	1.063 million	1.7/5.5	2.4/7.4
WCW Pro Wrestling	1.5/6.1	900,500	1.5/5.8	1.1/4.8*
WWF Mania	1.2/4.3	734,400	1.0/3.7	1.0/3.5

Weekly Breakdowns	In 4-6	In 11-13	In 18-20	In 25-27
Monday Night Raw	3.1/4.9	3.3/5.2	3.0/4.8	3.3/5.2
WCW Sat. Night	2.1/6.1	2.4/6.1	1.8/4.7	2.1/5.5
WWF All-American	1.6/5.1	1.3/4.2	2.0/6.0	1.9/6.3
WCW Main Event	2.0/4.6	1.6/3.8	1.9/4.6	Pre-Empted
WCW Pro	1.4/6.2	1.4/6.3	1.5/5.7	1.5/6.2
WWF Mania	0.9/3.7	1.1/4.2	1.4/4.6	1.3/4.7

JULY			
Week Ending July 4	Rtg/Share	Total Homes	Year Ago
Monday Night Raw	2.4/4.9	1.50 million	2.9/4.9
WCW Saturday Night	1.8/5.0	1.118 million	2.2/5.9
WWF All-American	1.8/6.2	1.115 million	Pre-Empted
WCW Main Event	1.4/3.8	870,000	1.7/4.9
WCW Pro	1.3/5.2	807,000	1.4/6.2
WWF Mania	1.1/3.7	687,500	1.2/4.0

Week Ending July 11			
Monday Night Raw	3.0/5.0	1.88 million	2.7/4.4
WCW Saturday Night	2.5/6.3	1.52 million	2.0/5.2
WWF All-American	1.9/5.8	1.19 million	2.4/7.5
WCW Main Event	1.8/4.3	1.12 million	Pre-Empted
WCW Pro	1.3/5.7	809,000	1.6/7.1
WWF Mania	1.1/3.9	690,000	1.1/4.1

Week Ending July 18			
Monday Night Raw	3.1/5.0	1.94 million	2.9/4.8
WCW Saturday Night	2.1/5.8	1.31 million	2.2/5.5
WWF All-American	2.0/6.0	1.25 million	2.4/7.7
WCW Main Event	1.8/4.1	1.12 million	2.0/5.2
WWF Mania	1.3/4.4	812,500	1.0/2.9
WCW Pro**	0.8/2.9	497,000	1.3/5.7

Week Ending July 25			
Monday Night Raw	3.4/5.5	2.13 million	3.0/4.9
WCW Main Event	2.4/5.4	1.49 million	1.8/4.0
WCW Sat. Night	2.3/5.6	1.43 million	2.2/5.7
WWF All-American	1.9/6.0	1.19 million	2.2/7.1
WCW Pro	1.4/6.0	872,000	1.3/5.7
WWF Mania	1.2/4.4	750,000	0.9/3.3

Special Events			
Clash of the Champions (6/23)	3.0/5.2	1.83 million	2.6/4.7
Clash Replay (7/1)	1.4/3.1	870,000	1.0/2.4

* Year ago figures represented as WCW Power Hour

** Aired one hour earlier than usual at 8:05 a.m. (EDT)

Belying trends of the most recent quarter, most of the weekly wrestling shows posted at least slight ratings increases over year-ago levels but none of the stature of *Monday Night Raw* in June. The USA series jumped 14 per cent over the previous June. Throwing out the decline any series posts on the evening of the Fourth of July, *Raw* will hold up in July. The 2.4 on the Fourth will drop its July '94 average to a 3.0 but that is still up from the 2.9 in '93. The first three Jim Ross-hosted episodes averaged a 3.2, led by the whopping 3.4 July 25.

While *WCW Saturday Night* did receive enough of a bump for its live episode July 9 to gain a TBS commitment for live telecasts of both *Saturday* and *WCW Main Event* Aug. 6-7, the monthly performances for both June and July have to be considered lackluster, what with the Hulk Hogan buildup. The June numbers were up only one-tenth of a point over the disastrous 2.0 last year and with one weekend to go in July, only the same modest year-to-year increase is on pace.

WCW Main Event actually registered a 10 per cent decline from June-to-June and only a 2.4 for the July 24 Ric Flair-Ricky Steamboat topliner has the Sunday series on track for a one-tenth of a point jump from July-to-July.

The major crash, however, has come to *WWF All-American*, which suffered a 29 per cent fall to a 1.7 from a 2.4 one year ago. Last June, the USA Sunday series was hitting shares in the 7-plus range on a regular basis. With one weekend to go in July, the show is headed for a 17 per cent decline from last year.

As has been the analysis in past months, *Raw* has become appointment TV for the weekly wrestling viewer and the level of match does not always equate the rating (hence higher numbers for Tatanka-Nikoli Volkoff than Bret Hart vs. 1-2-3 Kid). The key to track in August is how well the live doubleheader on TBS fares in the first week. That could key a move to even more frequent live airings than the monthly schedule being mulled.

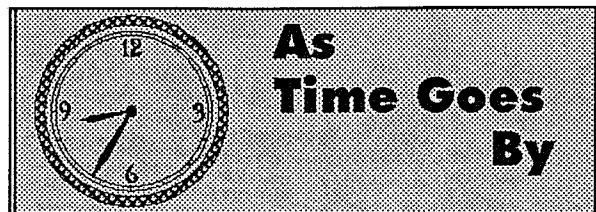
FINAL NOTES

Jim Crockett's *NWA Championship Wrestling* will be airing on predominantly weaker UHF stations and in late-night time periods in several key markets but he has snagged some choice slots in Chattanooga, Dothan, Montgomery and Gadsden, Al. The *Clash* rating has to be viewed on two levels: the 3.0 was good for TBS because it was up 13 per cent over the all-time low 2.6 of last June. But that had to be seen as a disaster for WCW, considering the heavy hype of Hogan's appearance. The August special last year showed a strong rebound. We'll see if the same trend follows....The Flair-Sting finale of that *Clash* peaked at a 4.4/7.2 (2.75 million homes), a full point up from last year's 3.4 for Flair-Arn Anderson vs. Pillman-Austin.

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With the launch of Jim Crockett's NWA *Championship Wrestling* in 12 markets in August and likely 12 more in September, the surprise is only one of the charter markets is in the Carolinas (Spartanburg). The rest are in Alabama, Tennessee and Mississippi.... WCW lost Dothan, Montgomery and Jackson, Ms., to NWA, largely on the basis of Turner heavily pushing the *Clash* and pay-per-views, which draw viewers away from local stations. Program managers have been ticked about it....As of the week of this writing, a substantial number of mid-level card WCW guys were expected to be dumped in favor of people Hulk Hogan wants.

At least a couple of stations on Jim Cornette's *Smoky Mountain* network are getting antsy about the racial comments of the new Gangstas team. Cornette's Atlanta affiliate (WTLK) is a predominantly Christian station....Jim Ross's work on *Monday Night Raw* has been in championship form. WCW will be absolutely stupid not to negotiate for Ross at the end of his two-month Titan deal but the WWF will be even more inept if it doesn't keep Ross in a major, major role....Here's a puzzler: Mike Tenay, one of the most mat-knowledgeable guys in America, was brought in for WCW's 900-number coverage of *Bash at the Beach*. Mike's a deserving guy---but why wasn't Gordon Solie, who lives a short distance away in Tampa, used?....For all the draw this is for the hardcore Philly fans, the July 15 episode of *Eastern Championship Wrestling* was the most continuously, gratuitously violent episode of a weekly wrestling series I may have ever seen. Just an hour of boards, tables, baseball bats, run-ins, pullaparts, etc. That's the kind of stuff which will burn out viewers the way Joel Goodhart's old live shows did those local fans, in my view.

The Real Wrestling Hotline attracted a record number of callers during July, thanks to interest in the McMahon trial and the live *Reporters' Roundtable* after the Hogan pay-per-view victory....USWA *Championship Wrestling* drew a 46 per cent share of audience in the Memphis market in May. That's up seven share points over the previous year. Credit much of it to Lance Russell's return....Despite a major push of the Hogan acquisition, we're told WCW's syndication lineup is in peril of dropping to a coverage level of 70% of the U.S. this fall. That would be the cutoff point for a number of national advertisers. Expect syndie chief Rob Garner to attempt to buy WCW's way into vulnerable markets.



THE GANGSTAS



arely has the importation of a heretofore small-market tag team created the advance intensity and speculation as that of Jim Cornette's pairing of The Gangstas, an openly racially-insulting combo. The twosome is one Cornette should quickly rethink.

The intent of The Gangstas is hardly subtle. It is designed to appeal to white redneck racist emotions Cornette feels are prevalent within Appalachian-area viewers.

Jim Cornette is perhaps one of the five or six brightest minds in the entire mat industry. He is also a personal friend of the publisher of *Matwatch '94*. Which makes this specific editorial all the more difficult.

Yet, when Vince McMahon has employed the racial parody of Akeem and the vulgarity of exploiting the Persian Gulf War as viewer attractions, wrestling publications have justifiably excoriated Titan Sports. When Ole Anderson used Rocky King as Buckwheat in a 1990 WCW angle to portray Ric Flair as a racist in order to get over a Junkyard Dog-Flair feud, we were no less scathing in our criticism. Consistency and decency calls for the same fingers to be pointed at Cornette, no matter our respect for his talent.

Comedy Central may employ tasteless O.J. Simpson jokes in vignettes on the often-vulgar cable network. But The Gangstas clearly attack the racial jugular with their initial O.J. remarks. That style may have drawn exorbitant heat even 15 years ago but is clearly inappropriate for 1994.

Matwatch '94 firmly calls on Cornette, who has the talent to attract fans without resorting to racism, to end the Gangstas' current storyline and rely on a better direction of creativity, of which he is quite capable.

IN THE MATTER OF JIM ROSS

Lost in much of the shuffle of the Vince McMahon trial and the Hulk Hogan pay-per-view extravaganza has been the top-level work of Jim Ross in a substitute role as host of *Monday Night Raw* and *WWF Superstars of Wrestling*.

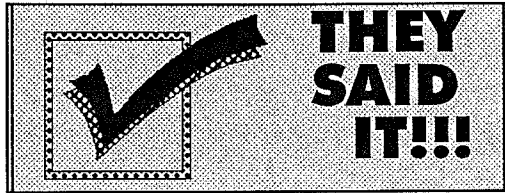
Ross has apparently been turned loose to call bouts in the style which made him the mat industry's top commentator of the late 1980s and most of this decade. His work on the Bret Hart vs. 1-2-3 Kid WWF title match July 11 on USA was arguably Jim's best call since the 1989 Ricky Steamboat NWA world title victory over Ric Flair.

After months of recuperating from a debilitating bout with Bell's Palsy, for which he still has a few remnants, Ross has made a first-rate recovery.

The matter remains of Ross's contract, which expires Sept. 5. McMahon clearly needs Ross as a major mainstay of his stable of announcers. After the embarrassing performance of Tony Schiavone at *Bash-at-the-Beach*, only a non-objective person in the WCW office cannot see the key element missing from Hogan's coronation was Ross as the top-line announcer.

If McMahon is as shrewd as his track record, he will end any threat of WCW by signing Ross to a new deal. Not even making a stab at regaining Ross would again show the ineptitude of elements of the WCW front office. Regardless, one of these two groups should quickly move to eliminate the prospect of the worst scenario---an idle Jim Ross.

(More Editorials on page 8)



The Best of July

1. Hulk Hogan/Jay Leno, *The Tonight Show*: (HH) "Everything we do is controlled. (JL) "Controlled? Is that a new word for it?" (HH) "Look, if you say fake, it's like saying we never get hurt." 2. Vince McMahon, WABC-TV: "I thought that, from time to time, the investigation was a bit unfair. I thought the charges that were hurled against me and my company were wrong." 3. McMahon, WABC: "We're about fun. That's what we sell is fun. And that's exactly what we're gonna do right after we leave this press conference is go back to work and start delivering more fun to everybody." 4. Sean O'Shea, WPIX-TV: "We thought we presented substantial evidence and we accept the jury's verdict." 5. Tony Schiavone, WCW: "I know a lot of announcers who haven't liked me. I don't think Gordon Solie is one of them." 6. Schiavone/Jesse Ventura, *WCW Worldwide*: (TS) "Thank you, Gene." (JV) "Why do you thank Gene Okerlund for doing his job?" (TS) "Okay, Gene got lost. Is that better?" 7. Bobby Heenan, *WCW Sat. Night*: "Hogan can't make change, or he'd be on MARTA, where he belongs." 8. Heenan, WCW: "The women in Cedar Rapids wear some of the loveliest bib overalls you've ever seen. With a red hanky hanging out." 9. Jim Ross/Randy Savage, *Monday Night Raw*: (JR) "I.R.S. appears to be even more agitated than ever." (RS) "I wonder if he wears a clip-on tie." 10. Schiavone/Heenan, *Sat. Night*: (BH) "Didn't Johnny Rich used to be a drummer?" (TS) "No. That was Buddy Rich. He's dead as a doornail."

11. Tommy Rich/ Lance Russell, *USWA*: (TR) "It's a conspiracy, Lance. I never used a chain." (LR) "Anybody who didn't see that chain, Tommy, was on Sominex." 12. Schiavone/Heenan, *Sat. Night*: (BH) "Levesque?" (TS) "Oui oui." (BH) "Raise your hand before you go." 13. Dave Meltzer, *The Real Wrestling Hotline*: "The only way to have kept the Hulk Hogan fans interested is for Ric Flair to have won this first match." 14. Steve Beverly, *TRWH*: "The only way to keep the old-line traditional NWA and Flair fans interested was for Hogan to have won this first match." 15. Heenan, *Sat. Night*: "The Rhodes family has made a lot of enemies in wrestling and in Texas. People have planted 'for sale' signs in their front yard." 16. Heenan, *Clash of the Champions*, on Hogan's police escort arrival: "Look! It's O.J. Simpson!"

(Continued on Page 8)

NWA Format Features NFL Today Twist

Nearly six years after selling his family wrestling business to Ted Turner, Jim Crockett started anew July 26 with his maiden taping of *NWA Championship Wrestling* in Chattanooga.

The television format will feature a twist on the old CBS *NFL Today* with Tully Blanchard—playing a straight babyface—and a secondary commentator in a control center setting, pitching to the arena floor for Joe Pedicino's play-by-play. The intent is to create a fast-paced series of wraparounds with 33-35 minutes of actual wrestling in every show.

Taped by WRCB-TV, the NBC affiliate in Chattanooga, Crockett's show will begin airing on twelve stations in the Southeast Aug. 20 with another dozen scheduled to come on board in September. An additional ten have invited Crockett to discuss the series after the first tapes are edited.

After assorted veteran names—Dory Funk Jr., Jimmy Garvin, Junkyard Dog and Dick Slater—pulled out of the three-show opener, Crockett settled on a roster combining long-time Crockett favorites from the 1980s with aspiring newcomers with limited front-line experience.

Greg Valentine, designated as NWA North American champion, Michael Hayes and the Rock and Roll Express were the primary veterans with a younger line stable of Curtis Thompson, Scott Studd, the Cole twins, Mike Golden, Chris Candido, Tammy Fytch, Peggy Lee Leathers, Bam-bi and—from the Global group—Tony Norris (Moadib), Ron Powers, Marc Valiant, Rick Gueren and the High Voltage tag team.

Early plans are for Pedicino not to have a designated color analyst but rotate NWA performers including Hayes and Jim Cornette, who reportedly will link his Smoky Mountain group as a member of the Crockett-led National Wrestling Alliance, along with Todd Gordon's Eastern Championship Wrestling, Dennis Coraluzzo's Northeast independent group and at least one promotion from Japan.

The opening night saw creation of a new lead heel team dubbed Hydra, led by Valentine, Norris in a new character of Siva, and Powers in the role of Aries. Ricky Morton, Studd and Thompson were pitted against the heel threesome as one of the show finales.

With the absence of Terry Gordy or Garvin, Hayes was teamed with Golden to form another heel pairing. The Studd-Thompson, High Voltage and Coles combos were the other opening night

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Crockett Closeup

✓ Jim Crockett Jr. produced *World Championship Wrestling* on TBS from 1985-88, when he sold his family's wrestling promotion to Turner Broadcasting System.

✓ Crockett originated the *Clash of the Champions* series of specials in 1988, the first featuring a Sting-Flair main event which drew a 7.1 rating and 15 per cent share.

✓ Crockett was under a five-year non-compete clause from WCW until November 1993. He begins the NWA show on 12 stations Aug. 20.

In Memoriam: Paul Robinson

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he name just above probably has many of you asking, "Who?" Paul Robinson never wrote for *Sports Illustrated* or *The New York Times*. He did not work in a big-city television or radio market. But Paul Robinson had more influence on my journalism career than any one human being.

On the evening just prior to this issue going to the printer, I received a late-night phone call from my father telling me of Paul's death at the age of 72. Paul had been battling cancer for two years. But my empty feeling is from knowing I was halfway through composing a letter to Paul to tell him how much he had meant to me—but could not finish it in time to mail it.

Paul Robinson may not have been a Pulitzer Prize-winner but he won four Georgia Associated Press awards for sports journalism. He may never have reported from New York or Chicago but he was the most knowledgeable sports editor I have ever known. He was a walking encyclopedia of Georgia high school sports from the 1940s to the early 1980s. He may not have been a world-class broadcaster but he was the definitive color analyst in south Georgia on high school football and basketball games during the 1960s.

When I was 14, Paul surprised me by giving me my first byline on a story. A truly forgettable piece for the readership of the *Waycross Journal-Herald* but not for me. The five-inch story was on a faculty-student high school basketball game in which a coach broke the gym record for scoring. That byline may have been a small gesture for Paul. But it illustrated his belief in using a lot of names in the paper, particularly to encourage young people.

Through my teen years, Paul was my strongest supporter as I became sports editor of my high school newspaper and lead radio broadcaster for high school football and basketball in Waycross, Ga. He read, listened, critiqued—and mostly encouraged.

During my first year of college, he hired me at the *Journal-Herald* and eventually made me assistant sports editor. But as he became managing editor of the paper, he also taught me how to gather news—and an excellent teacher he was!

He stood behind me when the heat came over a column I wrote condemning my alma mater for failing to award its coveted Best All-Around Athlete trophy to two black females. The young women had only won the state Class AAA tennis doubles title and led their girls basketball team to the school's first-ever state title in the same year. The good ol' white boy network invoked a little-known rule which required the All-Around winner to play three sports. Waycross High only offered two sports for women. The stalwarts of the Waycross Touchdown Club marched up to the newspaper office to cry foul. Paul Robinson defended me with more power than the then-Fearsome Foursome of the Los Angeles Rams.

When I won a Ralph McGill Scholarship in journalism to the University of Georgia, Paul made it page one news. He continued to follow my broadcasting career through occasional phone calls and frequent contact with my parents.

Most of all, Paul Robinson was a man who stood for truth and integrity. I could never live up to the values he taught in that newsroom—and in the Christian life he led for 72 years. His faith in God and in the youth of his community never wavered.

The writing style you may have liked or disliked for six years in *Matwatch* has its roots in Paul Robinson. He may not seem as great to you as he does to me. But that's because he wasn't your mentor—just mine.

NWA Taping

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tag teams. Crockett is targeting fall for a new NWA world tag team title tournament, once he settles on his key performers.

Insiders say Crockett wanted Paul Heyman to stage a Shane Douglas-Sabu or Douglas-Terry Funk bout on the ECW circuit to declare an NWA heavyweight champion without having to go the tourney route but Heyman could not be reached to okay it. Heyman originally had been targeted as booker for NWA, under its one-time proposed name of *World Wrestling Network*; however, Crockett and Heyman reportedly had a difference of opinion on the new group's direction, Crockett opposing the heavily violent style Heyman produces in ECW.

Boni Blackstone is handling ring introductions and Lesley Visser-style hallway interviews. At deadline, the team Cornette would manage had not been settled. But Crockett will not run competitive shows with Cornette, even if his show eventually airs in the same cities as *Smoky Mountain Wrestling*.

The decision for Blanchard not to sit in as permanent color commentator comes from the demands of Tully's current church schedule as a lay minister. Blanchard may not be able to make all of the tapings, so plans are for him to cut his wraparounds after viewing a rough cut of the tapes.

While several analysts have already predicted a rough road for Crockett's new circuit, the former executive producer of TBS wrestling is said to be ebullient about his chances of reviving a regional circuit. But Crockett is not expecting or touting miracles at the outset.

The second round of tapings begins Aug. 27, again in Chattanooga, at which time Crockett expects to launch the early rounds of his tag tournament.

They Said It!!!

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17. Rush Limbaugh, *Rush Limbaugh Show*: "The O.J. Simpson trial is getting to be just like professional wrestling. It's the most-watched program no one has ever seen."

18. Limbaugh, *RLS*: "You know how it is. The WWF and WCW get good ratings on cable. Yet, you can't find anyone who will ever admit to watching them."

Strongest Comments

1. Hogan, *Sat. Night*: "Flair, you've got the only real world heavyweight championship belt." 2. Savage, *MNR*: "Owen Hart and Neidhart---guilty of dividing the Hart family.....unlike a good friend of mine who was just proven innocent."

And the Rest....

DUMB QUESTIONS - 1. Art Donovan, *King-of-the-Ring*, on Shawn Michaels: "Who's that guy?" 2. Donovan, *KOTR*, on Lex Luger: "Who's the guy wearing that flag?"

WHAT'S NEW? AWARD - Tommy Rich, *USWA*: "Lance Russell, you and all these rednecks out here thought Tommy Rich was all washed up."

PETULANT AWARD - Jesse Ventura, *Bash at the Beach*, on Arn Anderson's turn on Dustin Rhodes. (Tony Schiavone: "Why do you think he did that?" Ventura, "I don't know. Why don't you ask him?").

SAY WHAT? - Schiavone, on Bunkhouse Buck/Terry Funk vs. Rhodes/Anderson: "I don't want to be at ringside to call that match."

WORST ANALYST OF THE CENTURY AWARD - Donovan, *King-of-the-Ring*.

DREADED GLITCH AWARD - WCW, for missing live shot of Anderson's DDT turn on Rhodes at *Bash*.

TERRIBLE TASTE AND MAJOR BOO AWARD - New Jack, *Smoky Mountain*: "Keep up the good work, O.J. Two down and a lot more to go!"

BLOOPER OF THE DECADE AWARD - WCW, for June 19 *Main Event* show giving away finishes for the next Thursday's *Clash of the Champions*. There is no explicable reason, excuse, or defense for this one.

MATWATCH '94

EDITORIALS

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McMAHON'S VICTORY

If you're a long-time fan of the World Wrestling Federation, chances are you feel Vince McMahon was a persecuted man for three years and have wildly celebrated at his acquittal on charges of illegally conspiring to distribute steroids.

If you are a veteran fan of the former National Wrestling Alliance territories, hate how McMahon repackaged the mat game in the mid-1980s and simply dislike his product, you are probably furious at the ineptly-prepared case of the United States Government against McMahon.

What remains inexplicable is how federal attorneys could spend an estimated \$10 million and three years of man-hours in investigating a case which results in not even the minutest conviction. Then, again, in the Clinton Administration, ineptitude has been a theme song.

A number of key analysts have suggested in less than flattering terms that McMahon beat a rap because he had a weak opponent. However, let it not be ignored: under the laws and legal procedure of the United States of America, McMahon had a trial and a jury of his peers declared him not guilty. Unless the government can produce charges of a different ilk, McMahon is entitled to enjoy the unchallenged freedom his acquittal affords. For those who feel McMahon did not pay a price, let it further not be ignored: the man had to spend an estimated \$5 million in legal fees and public relations expenses to defend himself. That is a fairly steep price to retain one's freedom.

WHAT'S GOOD FOR THE GOOSE....

Matwatch '94 extends congratulations to former *Real Wrestling Hotline* commentator Mark Madden on his recent appointment to the WCW Hotline. He will be missed from *TRWH* because he never missed a Sunday and often substituted for others who suffered illnesses. While his comments were at times borderline, particularly when he flagrantly associated names with the nearly-forgotten Missy Hyatt harassment case who have---to this day---never been named in a legal paper, Madden was dependable.

Madden accepted his WCW post after being offered a salary higher than his *TRWH* pay. Reportedly, he will simultaneously continue his work as a sportswriter for a Pittsburgh newspaper.

Curiously, wasn't Madden one of the harshest critics of the publisher of *Matwatch '94*, both privately and in hardly-subtle public jabs, because Steve Beverly worked on the WCW Hotline while publishing the original *Matwatch*? We in no way begrudge Madden for accepting his new post. But....as in the cliché Tommy Rich most often spouts: "What goes around comes around." Is there any difference in Madden's dual role from that which he previously criticized Beverly? Something to consider...

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